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## ABSTRACT

This paper offers guidelines to faculty on the conduct of faculty-student mentoring relationships, and suggestions of how to maintain ethical relationships with their students. The first guideline states that faculty must acknowledge the power and responsibility of the faculty role. The second explains how faculty need to develop a framework for evaluating the faculty-student relationships. An explanation is provided of what constitutes an ethical and constructive mentor-mentee relationship. Ethical considerations should be an ongoing aspect of professional behavior rather than a concern that arises only in response to ethical problems. Awareness of multiple role issues and experiences in addressing these issues can provide valuable lessons for student's future professional interactions with clients, students, and other professionals. (JDM)

# Navigating Roles in Mentoring Relationships

with Graduate Students

Maryka Biaggio, Paper presented at APA Conference,

San Francisco, August 2001

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Faculty-student mentoring relationships offer great rewards to both individuals. Graduate students gain guidance, information, and a role model, and faculty gain satisfaction, gratitude and perhaps the furthering of their work. Whereas faculty and graduate students have many occasions to interact, mentoring relationships bring faculty and students into close proximity. It is not unusual for faculty and graduates students in these relationships to have a variety of roles — teacher, advisor, and research mentor, for the faculty person, for instance, or supervisee and graduate assistant for the student. Given these various rewards and roles, faculty and graduate students approach these relationships with different motivations and desires. Thus, mentoring relationships can present challenges to faculty, since they must navigate these relationships in a way that will not create dual role conflicts.

There can be no question of the existence of dual roles for faculty and graduate students (Kitchener, 1988). They are part and parcel of the graduate education setting. American Psychological Association ethical guidelines now explicitly prohibit sexual relationships between psychologists and students over whom they have evaluative or direct authority (APA, 1992, Standard 1.19b). But

there has been little discussion of how faculty can avoid the gray areas of dual roles with students, and the mentoring relationships are likely to present many challenges in this respect.

The purpose of this presentation will be to provide some recommendations to faculty for the conduct of faculty-student mentoring relationships. By understanding the dual nature of these relationships and developing a frame for defining and evaluating the parameters of these relationships faculty can take appropriate measures to insure ethical management of mentoring relationships and also to facilitate the development of meaningful and beneficial mentoring relationships with students.

The multiple roles that characterize faculty-student mentoring relationships necessitate that faculty carefully consider the roles they inhabit in their work with mentees. For instance, while faculty obviously understand their role as instructors and conveyers of knowledge, this role carries with it an evaluative component that can complicate the relationship for the student. For instance, students may experience some trepidation about revealing a lack of understanding or deficit in their knowledge or skill at the same time that they are seeking guidance from a mentor. Or a supervisee may be confused about what personal information should and should not be revealed in the course of addressing his/her countertransference issues with a clinical supervisor. Or a graduate assistant may not know how to protest or even seek clarification about appropriate work assignments. That is, because of the multiple roles, as well as

the difference in power between faculty and students, the mentoring relationship can pose challenges for students and faculty alike.

I and my two co-authors Chenoweth and Paget (Biaggio et al., 1997) have proposed three guidelines for faculty to attend to in maintaining ethical relationships with students:

1) Faculty should acknowledge the power and responsibility of the faculty role. This may seem too obvious to warrant discussion, but making this explicit with one's mentees can help them give a name to discomfort that may arise from this fact. That is, it is important for faculty to concede, not only to themselves, but to their mentees that they hold a position of power and authority over students and that their conduct has consequences for students. This acknowledgment allows faculty to deal with the ramifications of their power in a deliberative manner; it allows for conscious and thoughtful decisions about how one comports oneself. One important corollary of this is that it is the faculty person's responsibility to broach this topic and to maintain an ethical stance vis a vis students. If faculty appropriately discuss the nature of their various roles with respect to students, then students are given permission to seek clarification if confusion arises.

2) Faculty should develop a frame for evaluating faculty-student relationships. Acknowledging and accepting responsibility for the faculty role is a necessary but not sufficient condition for maintaining ethical and constructive mentoring relationships with students. Judgments must be made about what

constitutes appropriate and beneficial conduct with one's mentees, and this is not always easy given the complex and shifting nature of these relationships.

Mentoring relationships evolve over time, from larger power differentials to less consequential ones, from clear role differentiation to more common and shared goals, and from less egalitarian to more collegial.

I contend that three conditions characterize ethical and constructive mentor-mentee relationships. Such relationships exist when: a) educational standards are maintained; b) educational experiences are provided for the student; and c) exploitative practices are absent. The first of these, the maintenance of educational standards, refers to the professional's responsibility to first uphold educational standards. That is, as educators of professional psychologists we have a responsibility to insure that students acquire the knowledge and skills expected of a person with a degree in professional psychology. This leads to the second condition, that students are provided with educational experiences. That is, the focus of the mentoring relationship should be on the mentor providing knowledge and experiences that will enhance the mentee's educational and professional development. Does this mean that the faculty mentor may not gain some benefit from the relationship? No, it just means that the faculty person should be providing a reasonable educational experience for the student. How should the mentor evaluate whether the benefit received by the mentor and educational benefit received by the student are out of balance? This brings me to the third condition: that exploitative practices are

absent. In effect, this condition dictates that the faculty person not be using the student primarily for his/her gain without consideration for the mentee's educational benefit. If the student is treated as an object of gratification, or if the relationship is more focused on meeting the professional or personal needs of the faculty person than on serving an educational purpose for the student, then it is likely that the student is somehow being exploited.

I would like to add one last general comment about the importance of faculty attention to ethical management of mentoring relationships. It is important for faculty to understand that they function as role models for students in their management of faculty-student mentoring relationships and their attention to navigating multiple roles. Students learn from the example that faculty set. Thus, it behooves faculty and the administrators of programs to attend to the general climate of their program. Open discussion of issues bearing on the conduct of faculty-student relationships sends a message about the importance of ethical management of these relationships and gives students permission to broach the topic with individual faculty. Also, such discussion instills the view that ethical considerations should be an ongoing aspect of professional behavior rather than a concern that arises only in response to ethical problems. Awareness of multiple role issues and experience in addressing these issues can provide valuable lessons for the student's future professional interactions with clients, students, and other professionals.

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